

2/11/2013 Testimony of Doris Fischer

SENATE JUDICIARY

EXHIBIT NO. 2

DATE 2/11/13

SEN. SB 220

Good morning.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee –

My name is Doris Fischer.

I live in Sheridan.

Richard, the love of my life, died from “ALS,” Lou Gehrig’s disease in 2007. Nearly 4 years later, I remember in vivid detail the anguish Richard endured during the last few months of his life.

Richard loved life, called his life a marvelous adventure, and was not afraid of death. He was, however, afraid of dying in the ways ALS promised to take him. Richard lost his ability to walk. He lost his manual dexterity and arm strength. He could no longer hold up his head. He choked on food, and liquids. His body stopped being nourished by the soft food he was barely able to swallow. His bladder and bowel muscles weakened, day by day. He had horrific leg cramps that sometimes took 45 minutes or longer to ease with constant massage. He slept only 2 hours at a time, and each time he awoke he had to remember all over again, that he was a prisoner in his own body. And that body was shutting down. The worst, for him, was not being able to get his breath. He often felt like he was suffocating. This man who used to shake the house with his sneezes, no longer had breath enough to sneeze.

Richard believed adults have the responsibility to make their own decisions. He faced his terminal illness with courage and wanted to die with dignity, as he had lived his life. Richard could have had great peace of mind and comfort if he had the choice of a peaceful and dignified death.

He didn’t get that choice, as he died before the State Supreme Court issued the *Baxter* ruling.

But now we know that Montanans do have the choice of aid in dying. And now it seems useful to codify the Supreme Court’s decision.

Senate Bill 220 will provide reassurance that the right of Montanans to choose aid-in-dying under a narrowly and clearly defined set of circumstances will not be abused. SB 220 will also provide reassurance for doctors. Please vote for SB 220.

Thank you.

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